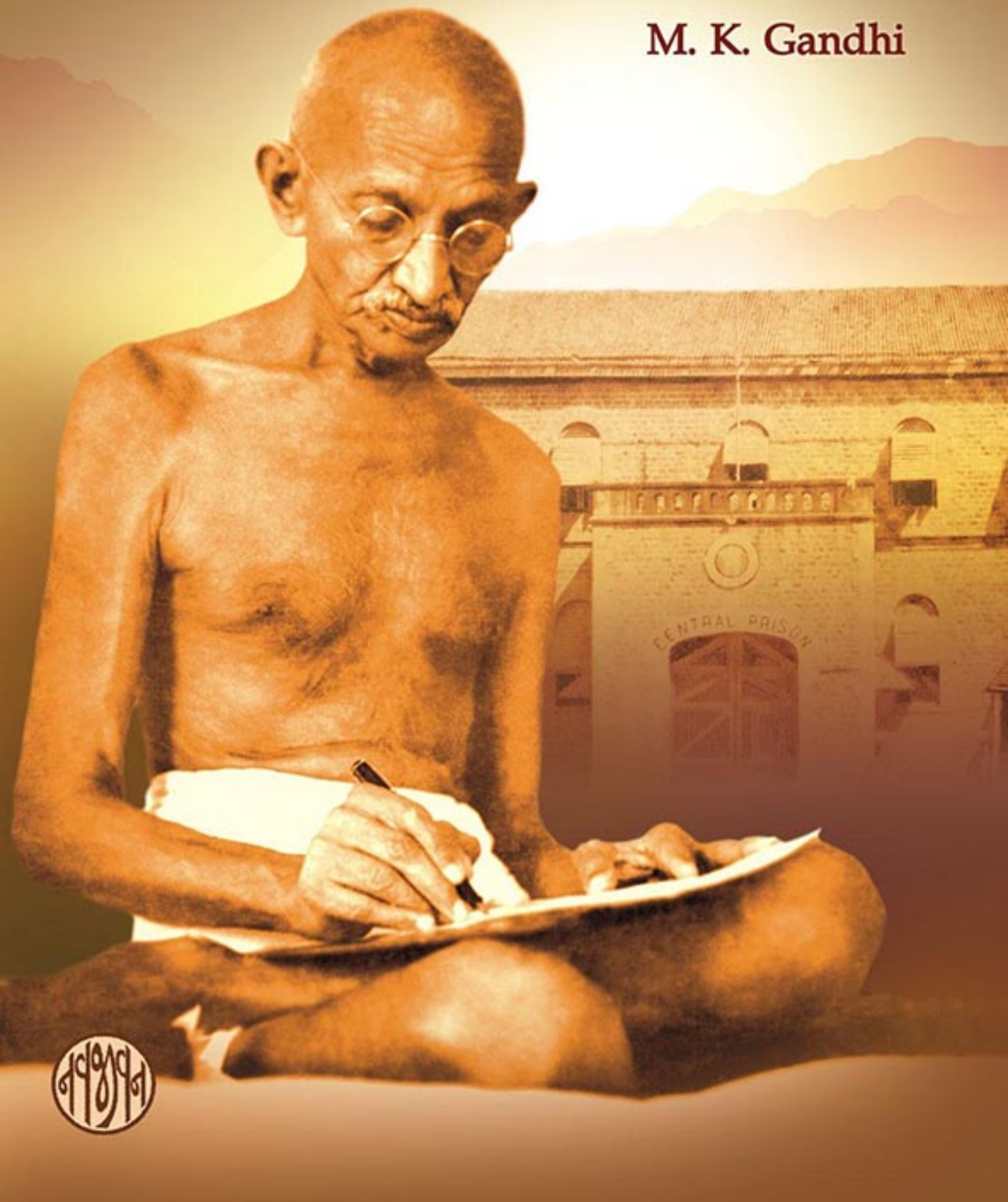
From Yeravda Mandir

M. K. Gandhi



VISIT…

From Yeravda Mandir

(Ashram Observances)

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FROM YERAVDA MANDIR

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PREFACE

During my incarceration in 1930 in the Yeravda Central Prison, I wrote weekly letters to the Satyagraha Ashram, containing a cursory examination of the principal Ashram observances. As the Ashram influence had already travelled beyond its geographical limits, copies of the letters were multiplied for distribution. They were written in Gujarati. There was a demand for translation into Hindi and other Indian languages, and also into English. Shri Valji Desai gave a fairly full translation in English. But seeing me in possession of comparative leisure during the recurrent incarceration, he has sent me his translation for revision. I have gone through it carefully, and touched up several passages to bring out my meaning more to my liking. I need hardly add, that if I was writing anew for the English reader, perhaps I should write a wholly new thing. But that would be going beyond my commission. And perhaps it is as well, that even the English reader has the trend of my thought as expressed to the inmates of the Ashram, and in the year 1930. I have therefore taken the least liberty with the original argument.

Yeravda Central Prison M. K. Gandhi

6th March, 1932

TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

Harijan, 29-4-33.p. 2

M. K. GANDHI

Translator's Note

(First Edition)

My grateful thanks are due to my friend and former pupil, Shri Ramanlal Gokuldas Saraiya, for valuable assistance in the rendering of the first three letters, and to Shri Duncan Greenless for reading the proofs.

Valji Govindji Desai

(Third Revised Edition)

This is a reprint of the second edition except for some verbal alterations suggested by my friend Shri Verrier Elwin who was good enough to go through the translation at my request. For the rest, war conditions are responsible for the increase in the price of this booklet, but I hope that when the next impression is out, it will be possible to return to its former popular price.

Vasantapanchami V. G. D.

Samvat 2001

1. TRUTH

I deal with Truth first of all, as the Satyagraha Ashram owes its very existence to the pursuit and the attempted practice of Truth.

The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means 'being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, such names of God as 'King of Kings' or 'The Almighty' are and will remain generally current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realized, that *Sat* or Satya is the only correct and fully significant name for God.

And where there is Truth, there also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word *Chit* or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss *(Ananda)*. Their sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as *Sat-chit-ananda,* one who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If

we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading.

But how is one to realize this Truth, which may be likened to the philosopher's stone or the cow of plenty? By single-minded devotion *(abhyasa)* and indifference to all other interests in life *(vairagya)* —replies the Bhagavadgita. In spite, however, of such devotion, what may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves *tapas*—self-suffering sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true *bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal.

In this connection it would be well to ponder over the lives and examples of Harishchandra, Prahlad, Ramachandra, Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, the Christian saints, etc. How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price: may He be so to every one of us.

2. AHIMSA OR LOVE

We saw last week how the path of Truth is as narrow as it is straight. Even so is that of *ahimsa*. It is like balancing oneself on the edge of a sword. By concentration an acrobat can walk on a rope. But the concentration required to tread the path of Truth and *ahimsa* is far greater. The slightest inattention brings one tumbling to the ground. One can realize Truth and *ahimsa* only by ceaseless striving.

But it is impossible for us to realize perfect Truth so long as we are imprisoned in this mortal frame. We can only visualize it in our imagination. We cannot, through the instrumentality of this ephemeral body, see face to face Truth which is eternal. That is why in the last resort we must depend on faith.

It appears that the impossibility of full realization of Truth in this mortal body led some ancient seeker after Truth to the appreciation of *ahimsa*. The question which confronted him was: "Shall I bear with those who create difficulties for me, or shall I destroy them?" The seeker realized that he who went on destroying others did not make headway but simply stayed where he was, while the man who suffered those who created difficulties marched ahead, and at times even took the others with him. The first act of destruction taught him that the Truth which was the object of his quest was not outside himself but within. Hence the more he took to violence, the more he receded from Truth. For in fighting the imagined enemy without, he neglected the enemy within.

We punish thieves, because we think they harass us. They may leave us alone; but they will only transfer their attentions to another victim. This other victim however is also a human being, ourselves in a different form, and so we are caught in a vicious circle. The trouble from thieves continues to increase, as they think it is their business to steal. In the end we see that it is better to endure the thieves than to punish them. The forbearance may even bring them to their senses. By enduring them we realize that thieves are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished. But

whilst we may bear with the thieves, we may not endure the infliction. That would only induce cowardice. So we realize a further duty. Since we regard the thieves as our kith and kin, they must be made to realize the kinship. And so we must take pains to devise ways and means of winning them over. This is the path of *ahimsa*. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Given these two conditions, the thief is bound in the end to turn away from his evil ways. Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world; we realize the greatness of God—of Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering; we become braver and more enterprising; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish, and the evil within us diminishes from day to day.

Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our presence there. What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachment to it. This freedom from all attachment is the realization of God as Truth. Such realization cannot be attained in a hurry. The body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over to our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find Truth. *Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically

impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.

3. BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY

The third among our observances is *brahmacharya*. As a matter of fact all observances are deducible from Truth, and are meant to subserve it. The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses? A man, whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selfishness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should, after what has been said before, appear a contradiction in terms.

If we look at it from the standpoint of *ahimsa* (non-violence), we find that the fulfillment of *ahimsa* is impossible without utter selflessness. *Ahimsa* means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means, "We two first, and the devil take all the rest of them." As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence one who would obey the law of *ahimsa* cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. Those who have enjoyed this happy condition will be able to bear me out. Many have to my knowledge successfully tried the experiment. If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all the women in the world are his sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to

their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrelling become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrelling where the love is selfish and bounded.

If the foregoing argument is appreciated, a consideration of the physical benefits of chastity becomes a matter of secondary importance. How foolish it is intentionally to dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment! It is a grave misuse to fritter away for physical gratification that which is given to man and woman for the full development of their bodily and mental powers. Such misuse is the root cause of many a disease.

Brahmacharya, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word and deed. We are told in the Gita, and experience will corroborate the statement, that the foolish man, who appears to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, makes a vain effort. It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray. Where the mind wanders, the body must follow sooner or later.

It is necessary here to appreciate a distinction. It is one thing to allow the mind to harbour impure thoughts; it is a different thing altogether if it strays among them in spite of ourselves. Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-cooperate with the mind in its evil wanderings.

We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control, the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition we must put forth a constant-endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves. Body and mind may be said to go together, so long as we continue to resist the approach of every evil thought.

The observance of *brahmacharya* has been believed to be very difficult, almost impossible. In trying to find a reason for this belief, we see that the term *brahmacharya* has been taken in a narrow sense. Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *brahmacharya*. I feel, that this

conception is incomplete and wrong. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time to expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt, that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success. Perhaps the palate is the chief sinner. That is why in the Ashram we have assigned to control of the palate a separate place among our observances.

Let us remember the root meaning of *brahma-charya*. *Charya* means course of conduct; *brahmacharya* conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma,* i.e., Truth. From this etymological meaning arises the special meaning, viz. control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

4. CONTROL OF THE PALATE

Control of the palate is very closely connected with the observance of *brahmacharya*. I have found from experience that the observance of celibacy becomes comparatively easy, if one acquires mastery over the palate. This does not figure among the observances of time-honoured recognition. Could it be because even great sages found it difficult to achieve? In the Satyagraha Ashram we have elevated it to the rank of an independent observance, and must therefore consider it by itself.

Food has to be taken as we take medicine, that is, without thinking whether it is palatable or otherwise, and only in quantities to the needs of the body. Just as medicine taken in too small a dose does not take effect or the full effect, and as too large a does injures the system, so it is with food. It is therefore a breach of this observance to take anything just for its pleasant taste. It is equally a breach to take too much of what one finds to one's taste. From this it follows, that to put salt in one's food, in order to increase or modify its flavour or in order to cure its insipidity, is a breach of the observance. But the addition is not a breach, if it is considered necessary for health to have a certain proportion of salt with food. Of course it would be sheer hypocrisy to add salt or any other thing to our food, deluding ourselves that it is necessary for the system if as a matter of fact it is not.

Developing along these lines we find we have to give up many things that we have been enjoying, as they are not needed for nutrition. And one who thus gives up a multitude of eatables will acquire self-control in the natural course of things. This subject has received such scant attention, that choice of food with this observance in view is a very difficult matter.

Parents, out of false affection, give their children a variety of foods, ruin their constitutions, and create in them artificial tastes. When they grow up, they have diseased bodies and perverted tastes. The evil consequences of this early indulgence dog us at every step; we waste much money and fall an easy prey to the medicine man.

Most of us, instead of keeping the organs of sense under control, become their slaves. An experienced physician once observed that he had never seen a healthy man. The body is injured every time that one over-eats, and the injury can be partially repaired only by fasting.

No one need take fright at my observations, or give up the effort in despair. The taking of a vow does not mean, that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning; it does mean constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed with a view to its fulfillment. We must not practise self-deception by resorting to some make-believe. To degrade or cheapen an ideal for our convenience is to practise untruth and to lower ourselves. To understand an ideal and then to make a herculean effort to reach it, no matter how difficult it is,—this is purushartha, manly endeavour. One who at all times fulfils the key observances in their perfection has nothing else left for him to do in this world; he is bhagavan, perfect man, he is a yogi. We humble seekers can but put forth a slow but steady effort, which is sure to win divine grace for us in God's good time, and all artificial tastes will then disappear with the realization of the Highest.

We must not be thinking of food all the twenty-four hours of the day. The only thing needful is perpetual vigilance, which will help us to find out very soon when we eat for self-indulgence, and when in order only to sustain the body. This being discovered, we must resolutely set our faces against mere indulgence. A common kitchen where this principle is observed is very helpful, as it relieves us from the necessity of thinking out the menu for each day, and provides us with acceptable food of which we may take only a limited quantity with a contented and thankful mind. The authorities of a common kitchen lighten our burden and serve as watch-dogs of our observance. They will not pamper us, they will cook only such food as helps us to keep the body a fit instrument for service. In an ideal state the sun should be our only cook. But I know that we are far, far away from that happy state.

5. NON-STEALING

We now come to the observance of Non-stealing. Like the last two this is also implicit in Truth. Love may be deduced from Truth, or may be paired with Truth. Truth and Love are one and the same thing. I am partial to Truth however. In the final analysis there can only be a single reality. The highest Truth stands by itself. Truth is the end, Love a means thereto. We know what is Love or non-violence, although we find it difficult to follow the law of Love. But as for Truth we know only a fraction of it. Perfect knowledge of Truth is difficult of attainment for man even like the perfect practice of non-violence.

It is impossible that a person should steal, and simultaneously claim to know Truth or cherish Love. Yet every one of us is consciously or unconsciously more or less guilty of theft. We may steal not only what belongs to others, but also what belongs to ourselves, as is done, for instance, by a father who eats something secretly, keeping his children in the dark about it. The Ashram kitchen stores are our common property, but one who secretly removes a single crystal of sugar from it stamps himself a thief. It is theft to take anything belonging to another without his permission, even if it be with his knowledge. It is equally theft to take something in the belief that it is nobody's property. Things found on the roadside belong to the ruler or the local authority. Anything found near the Ashram must be handed over to the secretary, who in his turn will pass it on to the police if it is not Ashram property.

Thus far it is pretty smooth sailing. But the observance of Non-stealing goes very much farther. It is theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it. We should not receive any single thing that we do not need. Theft of this description generally has food for its object. It is theft for me to take any fruit that I do not need, or to take it in a larger quantity than is necessary. We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of

Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of Non-stealing.

Theft, thus far considered, may be termed external or physical theft. There is besides another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others, or to cast a greedy eye on it. One who takes no food, physically speaking, is generally said to be fasting, but he is guilty of theft as well as a breach of his fast, if he gives himself up to a mental contemplation of pleasure, when he sees others taking their meals. He is similarly guilty, if during his fast he is continually planning the varied menu he will have after breaking the fast.

One, who observes the principle of Non-stealing, will refuse to bother himself about things to be acquired in the future. This evil anxiety for the future will be found at the root of many a theft. Today we only desire possession of a thing; tomorrow we shall begin to adopt measures, straight if possible, crooked when thought necessary, to acquire its possession.

Ideas may be stolen no less than material things. One who egotistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him, is guilty of a theft of ideas. Many learned men have committed such theft in the course of world history, and plagiarism is by no means uncommon even today. Supposing, for instance, that I see a new type of spinning wheel in Andhra, and manufacture a similar wheel in the Ashram, passing it off as my own invention, I practise untruth, and am clearly guilty of stealing another's invention.

One who takes up the observance of Non-stealing has therefore to be humble, thoughtful, vigilant and in habits simple.

6. NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY

Non-possession is allied to Non-stealing. A thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if we possess it without needing it. Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow; He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured, that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted; while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. Perfect fulfillment of the ideal of Non- possession requires, that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming impossibility. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes

real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Judging by this criterion, we find, that in the Ashram we possess many things, the necessity for which cannot be proved, and we thus tempt our neighbours to thieve.

From the standpoint of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. It has been truly said, that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body, and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths. The soul is omnipresent; why should she care to be confined within the cage-like body, or do evil and even kill for the sake of that cage? We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purposes of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fullness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember, that Non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. A man who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection we may consider the definition of knowledge contained in the 13th chapter of the Gita. We are there told, that humility *(amanitvam)* etc. constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true,— and there is no doubt that it is true,— much that we hug today as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and therefore only does us harm, instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but that activity should be *sattvika,* tending to Truth. One who has consecrated his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But we have to learn to distinguish between good activity and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.

7. FEARLESSNESS

Every reader of the Gita knows, that fearlessness heads the list of the Divine Attributes enumerated in the 16th chapter. Whether this is merely due to the exigencies of metre, or whether the pride of place has been deliberately yielded to fearlessness, is more than I can say. In my opinion, however, fearlessness richly deserves the first rank assigned to it. For it is indispensable for the growth of the other noble qualities. How can one seek Truth, or cherish Love, without fearlessness? As Pritam says, 'the path of Hari (the Lord) is the path of the brave, not of cowards.' Hari here means Truth, and the brave are those armed with fearlessness, not with the sword, the rifle and the like. These are taken up only by those who are possessed by fear.

Fearlessness connotes freedom from all external fear,—fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing reputation or giving offence, and so on. One who overcomes the fear of death does not surmount all other fears, as is commonly but erroneously supposed. Some of us do not fear death, but flee from the minor ills of life. Some are ready to die themselves, but cannot bear their loved ones being taken away from them. Some misers will put up with all this, will part even with their lives, but not their property; others will do any number of black deeds in order to uphold their supposed prestige. Some will swerve from the straight and narrow path, which lies clear before them, simply because they are afraid of incurring the world's odium. The seeker after Truth must conquer all these fears. He should be ready to sacrifice his all in the quest of Truth, even as Harishchandra did. The story of Harishchandra may be only a parable; but every seeker will bear witness to its truth from his personal experience, and therefore that story is as precious as any historical fact.

Perfect fearlessness can be attained only by him who has realized the Supreme, as it implies freedom from delusions. One can always progress towards this goal by determined and constant endeavour, and by cultivating self-confidence.

As I have stated at the very outset, we must give up all external fears. But the

internal foes we must always fear. We are rightly afraid of animal passion, anger, and the like. External fears cease of their own accord, when once we have conquered these traitors within the camp. All such fears revolve round the body as the centre, and will therefore disappear, as soon as we get rid of attachment for the body. We thus find, that all external fear is the baseless fabric of our own vision. Fear has no place in our hearts, when we have shaken off attachment for wealth, for family and for the body. 'Enjoy the things of the earth by renouncing them' is a noble precept. Wealth, family and body will be there, just the same; we have only to change our attitude towards them. All these are not ours, but God's. Nothing whatever in this world is ours. Even we ourselves are His. Why then should we entertain any fears? The Upanishad therefore directs us 'to give up attachment for things, while we enjoy them.' That is to say, we must be interested in them, not as proprietors, but only as trustees. He, on whose behalf we hold them, will give us the strength and the weapons requisite for defending them against all usurpers. When we thus cease to be masters, and reduce ourselves to the rank of servants, humbler than the very dust under our feet, all fears will roll away like mists; we shall attain ineffable peace, and see Satyanarayan (the God of Truth) face to face.

8. REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

This too is a new observance, like control of the palate, and may even appear a little strange. But it is of vital importance. Untouchability means pollution by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth in a particular state or family. In the words of Akha, it is an excrescence. In the guise of religion, it is always in the way, and corrupts religion.

None can be born untouchable, as all are sparks of one and the same Fire. It is wrong to treat certain human beings as untouchables from birth. It is also wrong to entertain false scruples about touching a dead body, which should be an object of pity and respect. It is only out of considerations of health that we bathe after handling a dead body, or after an application of oil, or a shave. A man who does not bathe in such cases may be looked upon as dirty, but surely not as a sinner. A mother may be 'untouchable' so long as she has not bathed, or washed her hands and feet, after cleaning up her child's mess, but if a child happened to touch her, it would not be polluted by the touch.

But *Bhangis, Dhedhs, Chamars* and the like are contemptuously looked down upon as untouchables from birth. They may bathe for years with any amount of soap, dress well and wear the marks of *Vaishnavas,* read the Gita every day and follow a learned profession, and yet they remain untouchables. This is rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed. By treating removal of untouchability as an Ashram observance, we assert our belief, that untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism, but a plague, which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat. Every Hindu, therefore, who considers it a sin, should atone for it by fraternizing with untouchables, associating with them in a spirit of love and service, deeming himself purified by such acts, redressing their grievances, helping them patiently to overcome ignorance and other evils due to the slavery of ages, and inspiring other Hindus to do likewise.

When one visualizes the removal of untouchability from this spiritual standpoint, its material and political results sink into insignificance, and we befriend the so-called untouchables, regardless of such results. Seekers after

Truth will never waste a thought on the material consequences of their quest, which is not a matter of policy with them, but something interwoven with the very texture of their lives.

When we have realized the supreme importance of this observance, we shall discover, that the evil it seeks to combat is not restricted in its operation to the suppressed classes. Evil, no bigger than a mustard seed in the first instance, soon assumes gigantic proportions, and in the long run destroys that upon which it settles. Thus this evil has now assailed all departments of life. We have hardly enough time even to look after ourselves, thanks to the never ending ablutions, and exclusive preparation of food necessitated by false notions of untouchability. While pretending to pray to God, we offer worship not to God, but to ourselves.

This observance, therefore, is not fulfilled, merely by making friends with 'untouchables', but by loving all life as our own selves. Removal of untouchability means love for, and service of, the whole world, and thus merges into *ahimsa*. Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of barriers between man and man, and between the various orders of Being. We find such barriers erected everywhere in the world, but here we have been mainly concerned with the untouchability which has received religious sanction in India, and reduced lakhs and crores of human beings to a state bordering on slavery.

9. BREAD LABOUR

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on Bread labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. Tolstoy advertised it and gave it wider publicity. In my view, the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita where we are told, that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean Bread labour.

Reason too leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man, who does not do body labour, have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread,' says the Bible. A millionaire cannot carry on for long, and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He therefore induces hunger by exercise, and helps himself to the food he eats. If everyone, whether rich or poor, has thus to take exercise in some shape or form, why should it not assume the form of productive, i.e. Bread labour? No one asks the cultivator to take breathing exercise or to work his muscles. And more than nine-tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority, at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food! And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed, if such people took a hand in it. Again invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, when everyone without exception acknowledged the obligation of Bread labour. It is common to all the *varnas*. There is a worldwide conflict between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their bread distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe Non-violence, worship Truth, and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This

labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate, everybody is not in a position to take to it. A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture however to be the ideal. Everyone must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for everyone to dispose of his own waste. If this is impossible, each family should see to its own scavenging. I have felt for years, that there must be something radically wrong, where scavenging has been made the concern of a separate class in society. We have no historical record of the man, who first assigned the lowest status to this essential sanitary service. Whoever he was, he by no means did us a good. We should, from our very childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is, for everyone who has realized this, to commence Bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

10. TOLERANCE, i.e. EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS - I

I do not like the word tolerance, but could not think of a better one. Tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas *ahimsa* teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth but all are imperfect and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.

The question then arises: Why should there be so many different faiths? The Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies; yet we recognize the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong.

Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north-pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.

Tolerance obviously does not disturb the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil. The reference here throughout is naturally to the principal faiths of the world. They are all based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great saints.

11. TOLERANCE, i.e. EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS - II

I would linger yet a while on tolerance. My meaning will perhaps become clearer, if I describe here some of my experiences. In Phoenix we had our daily prayers in the same way as in Sabarmati, and Musalmans as well as Christians attended them along with Hindus. The late Sheth Rustomji and his children too frequented the prayer meetings. Rustomji Sheth very much liked the Gujarati *bhajan, 'Mane valun,'* 'Dear, dear to me is the name of Rama.' If my memory serves me right, Maganlal or Kashi was once leading us in singing this hymn, when Rustomji Sheth exclaimed joyously, 'Say the name of Hormazd instead of name of Rama.' His suggestion was readily taken up, and after that whenever the Sheth was present, and sometimes even when he was not, we put in the name of Hormazd in place of Rama. The late Husain, son of Daud Sheth, often stayed at the Phoenix Ashram, and enthusiastically joined our prayers. To the accompaniment of an organ, he used to sing in a very sweet voice the song *'Hai bahare bagh,'* 'The garden of this world has only a momentary bloom.' He taught us all this song, which we also sang at prayers. Its inclusion in our *Bhajanavali* is a tribute to truth-loving Husain's memory. I have never met a young man who practised Truth more devotedly than Husain. Joseph Royeppen often came to Phoenix. He is a Christian, and his favorite hymn was *'Vaishnava jana'*, 'He is a *Vaishnava* (servant of the Lord), who succours people in distress.' He loved music, and once sang this hymn, saying 'Christian' in place of *Vaishnava*. The others accepted his reading with alacrity, and I observed that this filled Joseph's heart with joy.

When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, I can say, that I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of

reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each. Some things I did not understand then, and do not understand even now, but experience has taught me, that it is a mistake hastily to imagine, that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Some things which I did not understand first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy, which leave no sting behind them.

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object, that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the law of Love, he may be violent to us. If however we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule, that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.

12. HUMILITY

Humility cannot be an observance by itself. For it does not lend itself to being deliberately practised. It is however an indispensable test of *ahimsa*. In one who has *ahimsa* in him it becomes part of his very nature.

A preliminary draft of the rules and regulations of the Satyagraha Ashram was circulated among friends, including the late Sir Gurudas Banerji. He suggested, that humility should be accorded a place among the observances. This suggestion could not then be accepted for the reason that I have just mentioned.

But although humility is not one of the observances, it is certainly as essential as, and perhaps even more essential, than any of them. Only it has never come to any one by practice. Truth can be cultivated as well as Love. But to cultivate humility is tantamount to cultivating hypocrisy. Humility must not be here confounded with mere manners or etiquette. One man will sometimes prostrate himself before another, although his heart is full of bitterness against him. This is not humility, but cunning. A man may chant Ramanama, or tell his beads all day long, and move in society like a sage; but if he is selfish at heart, he is not meek, but only hypocritical.

A humble person is not himself conscious of his humility. Truth and the like perhaps admit of measurement, but not humility. Inborn humility can never remain and yet the possessor is unaware of its existence. The story of Vasishtha and Vishvamitra furnishes a very good case in point. Humility should make the possessor *realize,* that he is as nothing. Directly we imagine ourselves to be something, there is egotism. If a man who keeps observances is proud of keeping them, they will lose much, if not all of their value. And a man who is proud of his virtue often becomes a curse to society. Society will not appreciate it, and he himself will fail to reap any benefit from it. Only a little thought will suffice to convince us, that all creatures are nothing more than a mere atom in this universe. Our existence as embodied beings is purely momentary; what are a hundred years in eternity? But if we shatter the chains

of egotism, and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity. To feel that we are something is to set up a barrier between God and ourselves; to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God. A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it. But it is dried up, as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean. We do not exaggerate, when we say that life on earth is a mere bubble.

A life of service must be one of humility. He who would sacrifice his life for others has hardly time to reserve for himself a place in the sun. Inertia must not be mistaken for humility, as it has been in Hinduism. True humility means most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed towards the service of humanity. God is continuously in action without resting for a single moment. If we would serve Him or become one with Him, our activity must be as unwearied as His. There may be momentary rest in store for the drop which is separated from the ocean, but not for the drop in the ocean, which knows no rest. The same is the case with ourselves. As soon as we become one with the ocean in the shape of God, there is no more rest for us, nor indeed do we need rest any longer. Our very sleep is action. For we sleep with the thought of God in our hearts. This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never-ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable. This supreme state of total surrender is difficult to describe, but not beyond the bounds of human experience. It has been attained by many dedicated souls, and may be attained by ourselves as well. This is the goal which we of the Satyagraha Ashram have set before ourselves; all our observances and activities are calculated to assist us in reaching it. We shall reach it someday all unawares if we have truth in us.

13. IMPORTANCE OF VOWS

In this series I have dealt cursorily with the importance of vows, but it is perhaps necessary to consider at some length their bearing on a godly life. There is a powerful school of thinkers, who concede the propriety of observing certain rules, but do not acknowledge the necessity of vows. They go even so far as to suggest, that vows are a sign of weakness, and may even be harmful. Again they argue, that if a rule is subsequently discovered to be inconvenient or sinful, to adhere to it after such discovery would be positively wrong. They say: It is a good thing to abstain from liquor, but what harm is there in taking it occasionally, say on medical grounds? A pledge of total abstinence would be a needless handicap; and as with liquor, so with other things.

A vow means unflinching determination, and helps us against temptations. Determination is worth nothing, if it bends before discomfort. The universal experience of humanity supports the view, that progress is impossible without inflexible determination. There cannot be a vow to commit a sin; in the case of a vow, first thought to be meritorious but later found to be sinful, there arises a clear necessity to give it up. But no one takes, or ought to take, vows about dubious matters. Vows can be taken only on points of universally recognized principles. The possibility of sin in such a case is more or less imaginary. A devotee of Truth cannot stop to consider if someone will not be injured by his telling the truth, for he believes that truth can never do harm. So also about total abstinence. The abstainer will either make an exception as regards medicine, or will be prepared to risk his life in fulfilment of his full vow. What does it matter, if we happen to lose our lives through a pledge of total abstinence? There can be no guarantee, that our lives will be prolonged by liquor, and even if life is thus prolonged for a moment it may be ended the very next through some other agency. On the other hand, the example of a man, who gives up his life rather than his pledge, is likely to wean drunkards from liquor, and thus become a great power for good in the world. Only they can hope some time to see God, who have nobly determined to bear witness to the

faith that is in them, even at the cost of life itself.

Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a bulwark of strength. A man who says that he will do something 'as far as possible' betrays either his pride or his weakness. I have noticed in my own case, as well as in the case of others, that the limitation 'as far as possible' provides a fatal loophole. To do something 'as far as possible' is to succumb to the very first temptation. There is no sense in saying, that we will observe truth 'as far as possible'. Even as no businessman will look at a note in which a man promises to pay a certain amount on a certain date 'as far as possible', so will God refuse to accept a promissory note drawn by a man, who will observe truth as far as possible.

God is the very image of the vow. God would cease to be God if He swerved from His own laws even by a hair's breadth. The sun is a great keeper of observances; hence the possibility of measuring time and publishing almanacs. All business depends upon men fulfilling their promises. Are such promises less necessary in character building or self-realization? We should therefore never doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization.

14. YAJNA OR SACRIFICE

We make frequent use of the word *yajna*. We have raised spinning to the rank of a daily *mahayajna* (primary sacrifice). It is therefore necessary to think out the various implications of the term *yajna*.

Yajna means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life. Therefore, and also from the standpoint of *ahimsa,* it is not *yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter, that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the Vedas. It is enough for us, that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in Vedic scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of Vedic society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*.

Again a primary sacrifice must be an act, which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not, therefore, be a *yajna,* much less a *mahayajna,* to wish or to do ill to anyone else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the Gita teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *yajna* promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *yajna* in this sense, and therefore the Gita, after having dealt with true wisdom in the second chapter, takes up in the third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body therefore has been given us, only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And therefore, says the Gita, he who eats without offering *yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *yajna*. *Yajna*

having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus forever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bondslave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is a natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's Scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,"—this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten any one. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness but that of the world at large.

15. MORE ABOUT YAJNA

I wrote about *yajna* last week, but feel like writing more about it. It will perhaps be worthwhile further to consider a principle which has been created along with mankind. *Yajna* is duty to be performed, or service to be rendered, all the twenty-four hours of the day, and hence a maxim like परोपकाराय सतां विभूतयः - is inappropriate, if उपकार has any taste of favour about it. To serve without desire is to favour not others, but ourselves, even as in discharging a debt we serve only ourselves, lighten our burden and fulfill our duty. Again, not only the good, but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.

Some object, that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for the householder. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one, if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will therefore not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to answer to it. All of us know of a philanthropic tailor in Wadhwan. I know of one such barber. Every one of us knows such a weaver. And if we go deeply into the matter, we shall come across men in every walk of life, who lead dedicated lives. No doubt these sacrificers obtain their livelihood by their work. But livelihood is not their

objective, but only a by-product of their vocation. Motilal was a tailor at first, and continued as tailor afterwards. But his spirit was changed, and his work was transmuted into worship. He began to think about the welfare of others, and his life became artistic in the real sense of the term. A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying. Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immorality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude to life. One man will enjoy theatrical scenery, another the ever new scenes which unfold themselves in the sky. Joy, therefore, is a matter of individual and national education. We shall delight in things which we have been taught to delight in as children. And illustrations can be easily cited of different national tastes.

Again, many sacrificers imagine that they are free to receive from the people everything they need, and many things they do not need, because they are rendering disinterested service. Directly this idea sways a man, he ceases to be a servant, and becomes a tyrant over the people.

One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not therefore encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Again, one dare not be negligent in service or be behind-hand with it. He, who thinks that he must be diligent only in his personal business, and unpaid public business may be done in any way and at any time he chooses, has still to learn the very rudiments of the science of sacrifice. Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

16. SWADESHI

Swadeshi is the law of laws enjoined by the present age. Spiritual laws, like Nature's laws, need no enacting; they are self-acting. But through ignorance or other causes man often neglects or disobeys them. It is then that vows are needed to steady his course. A man who is by temperament a vegetarian needs no vow to strengthen his vegetarianism. For the sight of animal food, instead of tempting him, would only excite his disgust. The law of Swadeshi is ingrained in the basic nature of man, but it has today sunk into oblivion. Hence the necessity for the vow of Swadeshi. In its ultimate and spiritual sense, Swadeshi stands for the final emancipation of the soul from her earthly bondage. For this earthly tabernacle is not her natural or permanent abode; it is a hindrance in her onward journey; it stands in the way of her realizing her oneness with all life. A votary of Swadeshi, therefore, in his striving to identify himself with the entire creation, seeks to be emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.

If this interpretation of Swadeshi be correct, then it follows, that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or the sacrifice would be only in appearance. Pure service of our neighbours can never, from its very nature, result in disservice to those who are far away, but rather the contrary. 'As with the individual, so with the universe' is an unfailing principle, which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand, a man who allows himself to be lured by 'the distant scene,' and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition, but also fails in his duty towards his neighbours. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live, I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have a claim on me, and look to me for help and support. Suppose now I leave them all at once, and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependents out of gear,

while my gratuitous knight-errantry would, more likely than not, disturb the atmosphere in the new place. Thus a culpable neglect of my immediate neighbours, and an unintended disservice to the people whom I wish to serve, would be the first fruits of my violation of the principle of Swadeshi.

It is not difficult to multiply such instances. That is why the Gita says: 'It is best to die performing one's own duty or *srvadharma: paradharma* or another's duty is fraught with danger.' Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment, this gives us the law of Swadeshi. What the Gita says with regard to *srvadharma* equally applies to Swadeshi, for Swadeshi is *srvadharma* applied to one's immediate environment.

It is only when the doctrine of Swadeshi is wrongly understood, that mischief results. For instance, it would be a travesty of the doctrine of Swadeshi, if to coddle my family I set about grabbing money by all means fair or foul. The law of Swadeshi requires no more of me than to discharge my legitimate obligations towards my family by just means, and the attempt to do so will reveal to me the universal code of conduct. The practice of Swadeshi can never do harm to any one, and if it does, it is not *srvadharma* but egotism that moves me.

There may arise occasions, when a votary of Swadeshi may be called upon to sacrifice his family at the altar of universal service. Such an act of willing immolation will then constitute the highest service rendered to the family. 'Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it, and whosoever loseth his life for the Lord's sake shall find it' holds good for the family group no less than for the individual. Take another instance. Supposing there is an outbreak of plague in my village, and in trying to serve the victims of the epidemic, I, my wife, and children and all the rest of my family are wiped out of existence; then in inducing those dearest and nearest to join me, I will not have acted as the destroyer of my family, but on the contrary as its truest friend. In Swadeshi there is no room for selfishness; or if there is selfishness in it, it is of the highest type, which is not different form the highest altruism. Swadeshi in its purest form is the acme of universal service.

It was by following this line of argument that I hit upon Khadi as the necessary

and the most important corollary of the principle of Swadeshi in its application to society. 'What is the kind of service, 'I asked myself, 'that the teeming millions of India most need at the present time, that can be easily understood and appreciated by all, that is easy to perform and will at the same time enable the crores of our semi-starved countrymen to live?' and the reply came, that it is the universalizing of Khadi or the spinning-wheel alone, that can fulfill these conditions.

Let no one suppose, that the practice of Swadeshi through Khadi would harm the foreign or Indian mill-owners. A thief, who is weaned from his vice, or is made to return the property that he has stolen, is not harmed thereby. On the contrary, he is the gainer, consciously in the one case, unconsciously in the other. Similarly, if all the opium addicts or drunkards in the world were to shake themselves free from their vice, the canteen keepers or the opium vendors, who would be deprived of their custom, could not be said to be losers. They would be the gainers in the truest sense of the word. The elimination of the wages of sin is never a loss either to the individual concerned or to society; it is pure gain.

It is the greatest delusion to suppose, that the duty of Swadeshi begins and ends with merely spinning some yarn anyhow and wearing Khadi made from it. Khadi is the first indispensable step towards the discharge of Swadeshi *dharma* to society. But one often meets men, who wear Khadi, while in all other things they indulge their taste for foreign manufactures. Such men cannot be said to be practising Swadeshi. They are simply following the fashion. A votary of Swadeshi will carefully study his environment, and try help his neighbours wherever possible, by giving preference to local manufactures, even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere. He will try to remedy their defects, but will not because of their defects give them up in favour of foreign manufactures.

But even Swadeshi, like any other good thing, can be ridden to death if it is made a fetish. That is a danger which must be guarded against. To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting

national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited would be criminal folly, and a negation of the Swadeshi spirit. A true votary of Swadeshi will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner: he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest *ahimsa,* i.e. Love.

[This note on Swadeshi was not written in Yeravda Mandir in 1930 but outside, after Gandhiji's release in 1931. He did not write it in jail, as he felt he would perhaps be unable to do justice to the subject without encroaching upon the forbidden field of politics. The translation was done by Shri Pyarelal.

V. G. D.]